

Promoting Meaningful Work for the Disabled

Everyone has unique abilities — abilities to be celebrated and honored, and never used to hold anyone back professionally. I have heard people in the disabilities world call these “diverse abilities,” a term I like and find relevant.

Men and women in our communities who live with significant disabilities, including intellectual or developmental disabilities, have a right to choose meaningful paid work over day programs or volunteer work.

Work centers in the Sixth District agree with this sentiment of providing quality jobs for people with disabilities. I've had the chance to tour some of these facilities — including Lakeside Packaging in Oshkosh, Holiday House in Manitowoc, Green Valley Enterprises in Beaver Dam, RCS Empowers in Sheboygan and Northwoods, Inc. in Portage — and I've seen firsthand the good work that they do for our communities.

Capital Report

By Rep. Glenn Grothman
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U.S. House of Representatives

I've been passionate about this issue since my time in the Wisconsin State Legislature, when I worked with an organization called The Threshold in West Bend, which creates employment, social and recreational opportunities for people with disabilities.

Unfortunately, the federal government wants to make the lives of individuals with diverse abilities harder.

Last year, the Obama administration's Department of Education (DoEd) issued guidance on a law called the Workforce Innova-



tion & Opportunity Act (WIOA) that effectively resulted in a direct assault on work centers.

Specifically, the guidance stated that an “integrated setting” for employees with disabilities means — among other things — that state vocational rehabilitation programs cannot refer individuals with disabilities to businesses that were fairly awarded federal contracts through a law called the Javits-Wagner-O'Day Act (JWOD).

Since its enactment 75 years

ago, JWOD has helped millions of Americans with disabilities obtain good jobs, while learning critical skill sets that allow them to play an active role in our communities. As these opportunities are cut off, young people are left behind and too often slip through the cracks.

One constituent of mine who is particularly concerned about giving people with disabilities employment choice is Yael Kerzan of Pardeeville. Earlier this year, I had the opportunity to meet with Yael when she was in Washington, D.C. with her parents. Yael was born with Williams Syndrome, and for the past 15 years she has been employed at a work center that she loves in Wisconsin.

And because of the training and job coaching she receives there, she's proud to celebrate the fact that she's able to work not one — but two jobs: at Walmart and at Northwoods Incorporated of Wisconsin. Due to her success and how much she was able to

benefit from the program, Yael now advocates for others who can benefit from keeping all employment opportunities available to people with disabilities.

Since my meeting with Yael, I've been working with DoEd Secretary Betsy DeVos and a bipartisan group of lawmakers to expand, not limit, employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Work centers must be recognized as important parts of the community.

All people are entitled to the dignity of work in a location of their choice and the pride that goes with having a paycheck. That needs to happen without interference from burdensome government regulations.

Contact my Washington office at 202/225-2476; write to 1217 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515-4906; or visit my web site at: grothman.house.gov.

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